

Four-year PhD Programmes in Science – FAQs from the Roadshows

Background

Wellcome has launched a call for Four-Year PhD Programmes in Science. We are looking for scientific excellence and innovative research training programmes that will provide an outstanding environment for students to develop skills in research and critical thinking. We want to emphasise the importance of supporting the individual student's training needs and to encourage exciting (not only 'safe') research projects.

This call is also to develop a more positive culture for PhD training. This includes effective support strategies to aid students' transitions to the next stage of their careers, no matter what their ultimate career choice. All funded programmes will be expected to commit to being part of an evolving community of practitioners willing to engage and share best practice.

Wellcome held roadshows across the UK in autumn 2018 to discuss this funding call. This document addresses the frequently asked questions from these events and supplements the guidance available on our website and within the application form.

For ease, the questions have been grouped into the following categories: [General](#), [Directors and supervisors](#), [Partnerships](#), [Studentship structure](#), [Organisational support](#), [Research culture](#), [Finances and transition support](#).

General

What research areas will be supported in this competition?

All programmes must provide training in research that falls within Wellcome's [Science remit](#), including population and public health.

Training across disciplines is not mandated but should be included where this is required to achieve the overall aims of the programme. This can include, but is not limited to, research at the interface with social sciences, engineering, maths, physics and chemistry.

Do you need to have had Wellcome funding or hold an existing grant to apply to this scheme?

No. We welcome applications from applicants who have not received Wellcome funding to date, as well as current and previous Wellcome grantholders.

Do current Wellcome programmes have an advantage going into the call?

No, each application will be assessed on its own merits.

Can we link this application with an existing PhD programme?

We expect that some applications will follow on from previous programmes supported by a variety of sources (including Wellcome) and/or exist alongside other PhD funding. All applications to this competition will need to clearly articulate the added value of the proposed programme, and its relationship to any existing programmes (local or otherwise).

Links can be made to existing funding where this will support and enhance the aims and training opportunities of your programme. We expect the organisation to ensure that any

'linked' programme will provide equivalent support for all students associated with the programme overall including transition support, sickness and maternity benefits.

Do you have any specific disciplinary or geographical spread in mind for your final portfolio?

No, we have not set targets regarding the discipline nor the geographical location of programmes. We are expecting applications will cover a wide range of research areas.

Directors and supervisors

What expectations do you have for a director's track record?

The director of a programme must have a strong track record in research as well as leadership and training. Management experience will be required to successfully deliver the aims of the programme. They must have the full support of the host organisation to deliver on the commitments made. This includes having sufficient time to manage the programme and recognition from the organisation for the important role played.

Can directors or supervisors be involved in more than one bid?

A director can only lead one programme.

A supervisor may be associated with more than one programme (at their host organisation or another organisation).

How many supervisors should make up the supervisory pool?

We do not have any requirements for the size of the supervisory pool. The pool should comprise sufficient supervisors to accommodate the overall number of students. Programmes should also ensure that there is a breadth of expertise to give students a good range of choice when selecting their PhD projects. In general, we would not expect an individual to be the main supervisor for more than two Wellcome-funded students at the same time.

All supervisors must have the time and support from their Department to take on the responsibility of supervision. We expect early career researchers and new lecturers to be included in the supervisory pool.

How will the supervisory pool be assessed?

Supervisors are a central component of the programme. We will review the proposed approach to managing, supporting and training supervisors. We will also look at supervisors' overall research experience and profile (relative to career stage), how the student/supervisor selection will be made as well as the wider context in which the programme is embedded.

We recognise that the supervisory pool will evolve over the course of the programme.

Can newly independent researchers/lecturers be supervisors?

Yes. You should consider how the programme will ensure that all supervisors are skilled and/or supported to develop their skills in PhD training and in diverse and inclusive leadership.

Do you require thesis committees?

No. The programme must put forward its ideas, which may include a thesis committee, for the best way to support the students undertaking PhD training, ensuring balanced support and feedback. We support the principle of co-supervision and recognise the value of including external input. Programmes should place the student first and consider how best to structure interactions involving co-supervision.

Partnerships

Must the proposed programmes include partnerships?

There is no requirement for programmes to include partnerships, or to form geographical clusters. Partnerships should be formed only where they add value to the training opportunities proposed. Both the benefits to and impact on students must be considered.

Any partnership must allow the proposed programme to comply with Wellcome's [grant conditions](#).

If we want to partner, what's possible?

Programmes can involve partnerships between departments or institutes as well as between [eligible organisations](#). In addition, partnerships with industry or healthcare providers can be proposed. Partners can be based anywhere in the world.

Studentship structure

Why change the 1+3 structure? What about the current approach was not working?

The 1+3 model (1 year of rotations and 3 years of research) of PhD training has both a number benefits and challenges. Our review of PhD training acknowledged the value of rotations, but also highlighted that completing an innovative research project in 3 years can be challenging, stressful and not suited to everyone.

Therefore, we have removed the constraint around programme structure but retained the commitment to provide 4 years of support for each student. This allows programmes to decide on the most appropriate structure for their students. Each application will have to justify their proposed approach in the context of its training aims and the type of research proposed.

Can we integrate a taught masters into our programme?

Yes. You will need to make the case for why this is the best approach to training and skills development for your proposed programme. Both the benefits to and impact on the student must be considered.

What training for students should be included as part of a programme?

We expect that each proposed programme should formulate a training strategy based on the requirements of its students and the research being undertaken. However, programmes must provide students with opportunities to develop skills in scientific enquiry and training in the principles of statistical methodology, computational programming and data analytics. Good research practice must form an integral part of the training strategy in a way that builds awareness and skills throughout the course of the PhD. Students should also develop a broader understanding of how their PhD project fits into the wider research context.

It will be important to address how a programme will ensure personalised development and career planning for students.

How can students be supported to tackle innovative ideas in their PhD training?

One role of the programme director(s) and supervisors is to facilitate creative PhD projects. All projects should develop critical thinking and enquiry skills. We hope that the emphasis on using preprint servers, ensuring that students get credit more rapidly for the work they have done, the opportunities available via the transition support fund (please see section on [Finances and transition support](#)) and the removal of the constraints of a 1+3 studentship model will further facilitate this.

Organisational support

How many applications can a single organisation submit?

There is no specified limit. Organisations are expected to work with all potential applicants and only commit to programmes that can be fully supported to deliver their stated ambitions. We reserve the right to ask institutions to prioritise their applications if we receive an unmanageable number overall.

What are your expectations regarding organisational contributions?

We are looking for a demonstrable commitment to delivering on the aims of the programme. This can take many forms. It could include, but is not limited to, support for cultural change e.g in improving diversity and mental health; support to meet the commitment to publish data about student recruitment, completion rates and career destinations (see <http://nglscoalition.org/>); and, if appropriate, additional studentships.

Any additional students must receive equivalent support to the Wellcome-funded students. This includes stipend rates, running costs, transition funding and access to paid sick and parental leave in line with staff employed by the organisation.

Who should be involved in bid preparation at an organisational level?

You may wish to engage with colleagues at your organisation(s) who can provide a broader context to the bid. This includes, but is not limited to, colleagues with expertise in research training from a variety of disciplines (including the doctoral training college, if relevant), research management, human resources, undergraduate widening participation offices etc.

Research culture

Are you expecting cultural change to be applied only to Wellcome's cohort?

These programmes are an opportunity for organisations to develop innovative approaches in PhD training, where the need exists. Changes might be applied to only Wellcome students in the first instance or to a broader cohort from the beginning. However, broader change is our ultimate aim and we are looking for approaches in these programmes to help catalyse wider change. We want to understand how the various proposed approaches will be monitored (for both positive and negative impacts) in the short, medium and long term. We recognise that culture change takes time and are not looking for immediate impact.

We are working with funders and other partners to develop networks and communities to support wider cultural change.

Finances and transition support

How will funding be provided for each programme?

The programme director(s) for each funded programme will be awarded a block grant, to provide funding for all studentships associated with a programme. Funds can be managed flexibly by the programme director(s) to meet the needs of the cohort and each student. This will allow support to be tailored to the individual student by those best placed to understand their requirements.

As a guide, a potential breakdown of funding for a programme is provided below.

- Student stipends – to be provided at Wellcome’s current rates, as indicated [here](#) under the ‘What we offer’ section
- PhD registration fees at the UK/EU rate
- College fees, where applicable
- Funds for materials and consumables, travel and training – up to £240,000 per cohort, assuming a cohort of 5 students
- Funds for animal studies – to be determined by the individual needs of each programme
- A transition support fund – up to £100,000 per cohort, assuming a cohort of 5 students

This breakdown is an estimate of costs and is subject to change. Moreover, costs will likely vary between programmes due to different stipend rates inside and outside of London, the total number of students in a cohort and variation in funds provided for animal studies, for example.

What is the purpose of the transition support fund?

We will allocate a specific budget to each programme for a transition support fund. The fund can be used to support students:

- prior to the start of their training to prepare for or transition into a PhD
- post-thesis submission to make the most of their PhD training and transition to the next stage of their career. This could be a career in research, teaching, policy, SME, business, industry or another sector.

How should programmes manage the transition support fund?

Each funded programme will be required to implement transparent application processes or governance structures with clear, student-focused review criteria. The length and type of support may vary depending on the student’s needs. The fund is not for the supervisor to allocate according to their priorities.

We are seeking advice on the possible mechanism for this to ensure equal opportunities and visa regulations are upheld.